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Near East and South Asia Review

19 December 1986

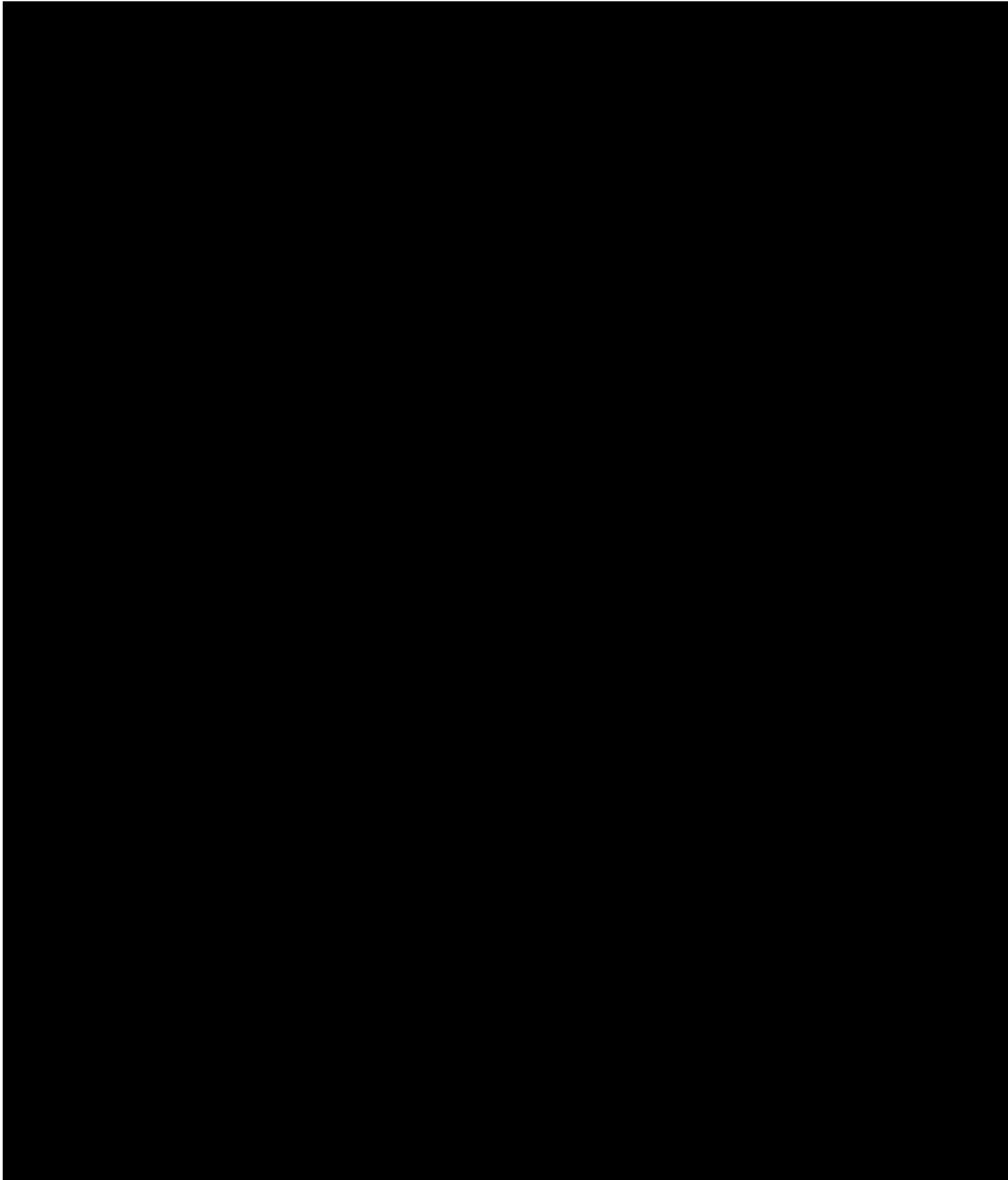
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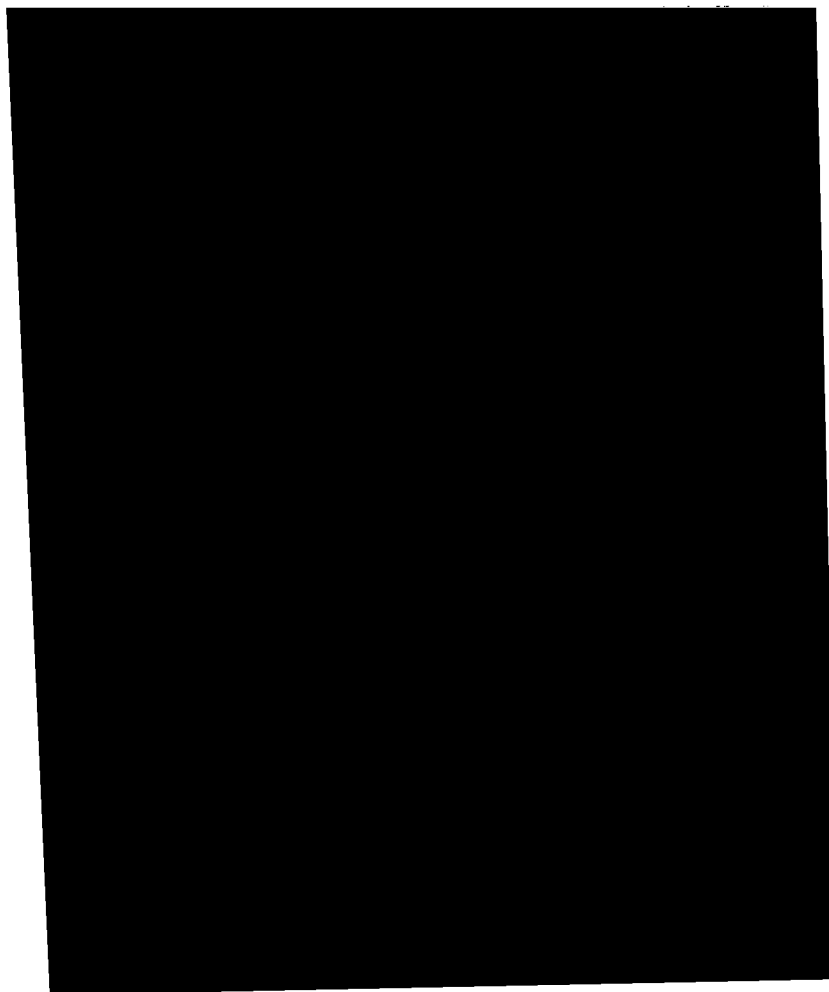
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South Asian Nations: Inching Toward Cooperation [REDACTED]

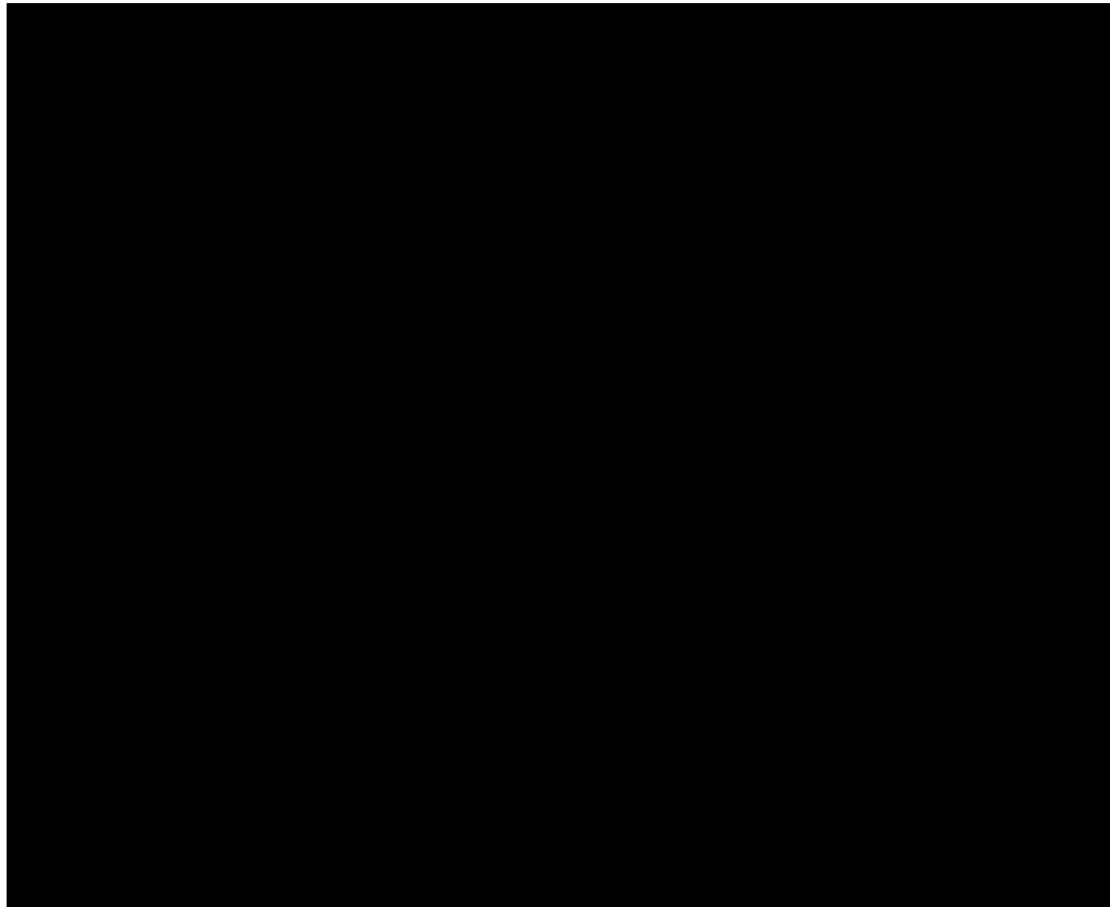
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[REDACTED]

The second annual summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation produced modest progress toward the organization's goal of increased partnership. The member states agreed to further discussion on terrorism and narcotics and provided an opportunity for the leaders to conduct private talks on sensitive issues. [REDACTED]

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South Asian Nations: Inching Toward Cooperation [REDACTED]

The second annual summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Bangalore, India, on 17-19 November produced modest progress toward the organization's goal of increased partnership. The member states—India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives—agreed to joint declarations and further discussion on touchy issues such as terrorism and narcotics. The SAARC summit meeting also provided an opportunity for the leaders of the individual states to conduct private talks on sensitive bilateral issues that produced several new efforts to relax regional tensions. The self-interest of each state, however, will work against significant movement on controversial regional issues. [REDACTED]

SAARC's First Year

SAARC was formally launched in December 1985 at a summit meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Throughout 1986 officials from the SAARC member states met to prepare for the second summit meeting in Bangalore. General declarations and recommendations were issued on ways SAARC members could better cooperate on issues, such as terrorism and narcotics, but no major substantive agreements were reached:

- A SAARC economic ministerial meeting was held in Islamabad in April.
- A SAARC study group on terrorism met in Dhaka in June.
- The SAARC Foreign Ministers' Conference was held in Dhaka last August.
- A study group on drug trafficking and drug abuse met in September, also in Dhaka. [REDACTED]

This low-key approach to cooperation has apparently paid off in a lessening of distrust among the SAARC member states. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SAARC foreign ministers were "cautiously optimistic" about growing cooperation among the member countries. The smaller states were initially concerned about Indian attempts to dominate the organization, [REDACTED] but were heartened by New Delhi's conciliatory approach at

SAARC gatherings. All the SAARC member states agreed to Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi becoming the next chairman of SAARC at the Bangalore meeting. He will serve until the next summit meeting, scheduled for late 1987 in Kathmandu. [REDACTED]

Results of the Bangalore Summit

The SAARC summit meeting produced the "Bangalore Declaration," which stressed general agreement on substantive regional concerns. [REDACTED]

Terrorism. All seven member states agreed to condemn "all methods and practices of terrorism" as criminal and decided to reconvene the study group, headed by India, at a date to be determined. The members also recognized the importance of UN Resolution 2625, which requires all states to abstain from organizing, instigating, assisting, or participating in terrorist acts. [REDACTED]

Narcotics. The SAARC countries formally agreed to add narcotics to the "core issues" addressed by the organization. The Bangalore Declaration urged greater cooperation and information sharing in halting illegal narcotics trafficking and reducing drug abuse in the member states. The declaration also pledged to set up a technical committee, chaired by Pakistan, that will meet next year to draw up more specific recommendations, according to the US Embassy in Islamabad. [REDACTED]

Other International Issues. The SAARC heads of state rounded out the Bangalore Declaration by calling for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and a return to economic "multilateralism" through a resumption of the North-South dialogue. The

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declaration specifically advocated enlarged concessional economic assistance from donor nations, "amelioration" of official debts, trade liberalization, commodity price stabilization, increased technology transfer, and special treatment for the least developed SAARC countries. [REDACTED]

Administrative Issues. In a separate Memorandum of Understanding, the SAARC countries agreed on several unresolved administrative issues. All seven states agreed to set up a permanent secretariat in Kathmandu, Nepal, with a target inauguration date of 16 January 1987. [REDACTED]

The first secretary general, Abdul Ahsan, is from Bangladesh and will serve for two years. There will also be four directors general—one each from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Bhutan and the Maldives will not be represented in the Secretariat because they cannot afford to pay the salaries. [REDACTED]

Finally, the SAARC heads of state approved a formula for funding that assigns most of the burden to India (32 percent) and Pakistan (24 percent). [REDACTED]

Bilateral and Trilateral Talks

The South Asian heads of state took the opportunity provided by the summit meeting to hold private bilateral talks and achieved modest progress on sensitive issues. [REDACTED]

India-Pakistan. Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Mohammad Khan Junejo held private conversations that produced agreements that may ease currently tense bilateral relations. At the end of the summit meeting, the two countries announced that high-level officials from their respective Interior Ministries would meet in Pakistan in December to discuss border problems including illegal border crossings, alleged Pakistani support to militant Sikhs, drug trafficking, and smuggling. Indian Foreign Secretary Venkateswaran is to travel to Islamabad at a later date to resume stalled talks on normalization of bilateral relations. [REDACTED]

The two leaders, however, made no progress on easing Islamabad's concerns about large Indian military exercises near the Pakistani border or dealing with New Delhi's charges that Pakistan is developing a

nuclear bomb. [REDACTED]

Gandhi publicly said he was "utterly unconvinced" by Junejo's denials that Pakistan was building a bomb and also criticized Junejo's proposal at the summit meeting that SAARC states send observers to monitor each other's military exercises. [REDACTED]

India-Sri Lanka. In a series of meetings, Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Jayewardene appeared to make progress on reviving the stalled Sri Lankan peace talks. [REDACTED]

Gandhi and Jayewardene came up with a plan to redraw provincial boundaries in Tamil-dominated areas of Sri Lanka and to coax the insurgents back to the negotiating table. The major Tamil insurgent group, however, has rejected all of Colombo's peace proposals. [REDACTED]

Water Sharing. India, Bangladesh, and Nepal discussed ways to better apportion the waters of the Ganges River that runs through all three countries. [REDACTED]

Dhaka was glad that Gandhi agreed to include Nepal in the talks, since New Delhi had previously insisted that the Ganges water issue should be settled bilaterally between India and Bangladesh. [REDACTED]

Nepal is holding up plans for further tripartite talks by refusing to share data on Ganges waterflow until Dhaka and New Delhi agree to include navigation rights in the talks. [REDACTED]

Prospects for SAARC

The Bangalore summit meeting reaffirmed the basic viability of SAARC as a vehicle for South Asian cooperation. [REDACTED]

most SAARC countries viewed the meeting as a modest success, both in its progress toward multilateral cooperation and in its use as a forum for bilateral talks. India appears relieved that the smaller SAARC states did not use the meeting to "gang up" on New Delhi, while the smaller states are probably pleased that India is not trying to dominate the organization. [REDACTED]

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Despite this optimism, SAARC remains a fragile organization that could be easily disrupted by the injection of intractable political issues. Cooperation on neutral administrative issues may unrealistically increase expectations about progress on more substantive matters. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Future SAARC progress will probably be confined to noncontroversial issues, although the organization will continue to be valuable as a venue for private bilateral discussions among the member states. [REDACTED]

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